



The EDITH *and* LORNE PIERCE
COLLECTION *of* CANADIANA



Queen's University at Kingston

ARCTIC DISCOVERY IN 1838.

BY MESSRS. P. W. DEASE AND T. SIMPSON.

[*Extracted from the London Geographical Journal.*]

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An Account of Arctic Discovery on the Northern Shore of America in the Summer of 1838. By MESSRS. PETER WARREN DEASE and THOMAS SIMPSON. Communicated by I. H. PELLY, Esq., Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Fort Confidence, Great Bear Lake, 15th Sept., 1838.

HON. SIRS,—It now becomes our duty to report the incomplete success of the expedition to the eastward this summer, in consequence of the extraordinary duration of the ice. Much, however, has been done to prepare the way for another attempt next year; and our hopes, instead of being depressed, are elevated by the knowledge so painfully acquired this season.

On the 6th of June our boats were conveyed on the ice to the mouth of Dease's river (then just open), the ascent of which was commenced the following day. With some assistance from Indians, we reached the portage leading to the "dismal" lakes (discovered by Mr. Simpson last winter) and carried the boats across it without accident. The ice on these lakes was still perfectly solid; and we were provided with iron-shod sledges for the passage. On these we fixed the boats, and, the wind being fair, hoisted sail, which greatly aided the crews on the hauling ropes. In this manner these frozen reservoirs, which are fully 30 miles long, were passed in two days, and we reached our provision station at "Kendall" river on the 19th. There we had the satisfaction to find the two men (left there by Mr. Simpson in April) well, and their Hare Indian hunters successful in the chase. Two of these active fellows consented at once to accompany us along the coast; and proved not only good voyagers, but, during our frequent detentions among the ice, killed so many rein-deer as enabled us to save nearly half our summer stock of provisions. Next day (20th June) we proceeded to the Coppermine river, which we found still fast. It gave way on the 22nd, and we descended all its terrible rapids at full flood, while the ice was still driving. Below the Bloody Fall the river did not clear out till the 26th, and on the 1st of July we pitched our tents at the ocean. Two or three Esquimaux families were seen there, but they took the alarm, and fled over the ice towards some distant islands. Here and on various parts of the coast a fine collection of plants was made by Mr. Dease.

We remained imprisoned in the mouth of the Coppermine, awaiting the opening of the ice, till the 17th of July. Our subsequent progress along the coast was one incessant, we may say desperate, struggle with the same cold obdurate foe; in which the boats sustained serious damage, several planks being more than half cut through. At various points we saw *caches* of the Esquimaux placed upon lofty rocks, out of reach of beasts of

prey ; but we did not fall in with any of the owners, who seemed to have all gone inland to kill rein-deer, after their winter seal-hunt among the islands. Fragments of Dr. Richardson's mahogany boats were found widely scattered ; and many articles left by his party at the Bloody Fall were carefully preserved in the native keepings. On the 29th of July we at length succeeded in doubling Cape Barrow. The northern part of Bathurst's inlet was still covered with a solid sheet of ice ; and, instead of being able to cross over direct to Point Turnagain, we were compelled to make a circuit of 140 miles by Arctic Sound and Barry's Islands. On the easternmost of that group Mr. Simpson discovered, at the base of a crumbling cliff, several pieces of pure copper-ore, and the adjacent islands had also the appearance of being strongly impregnated with that metal. A series of specimens of all the principal rocks along the coast was preserved. In order to attain Cape Flinders, we had to perform a portage across an island, and several over the ice. On the 9th of August we doubled that cape ; and in a little bay, three miles to the southward of Franklin's farthest encampment in 1821, our boats were finally arrested by the ice, which encompassed them for twenty-two days ! so different was the season of 1838 from that of 1821, when Franklin found a perfectly open sea there on the 16th of August. In June, the early part of July, and the middle of August, we had frequent storms, accompanied by snow and frost ; but during the greater part of July and the beginning of August storms prevailed, which, together with the severity of the preceding winter, we consider as the cause of the tardy disruption of the ice this season.

On the 20th of August we were obliged to relinquish all hopes of advancing farther with the boats. That our efforts might not however prove wholly fruitless, Mr. Simpson offered to conduct an exploring party on foot for ten days. It was at the same time arranged between us, that, in the event of any favourable movement taking place in the ice, Mr. Dease should advance with one boat. Signals were agreed upon to prevent our missing each other on the way ; and, should we unfortunately do so, the last day of August was fixed for the rendezvous of both parties at Boat Harbour. That unlucky spot is situated in lat. $68^{\circ} 16' N.$, long. $109^{\circ} 2' W.$; variation of the compass $46^{\circ} E.$ Mr. Simpson's narrative of his journey and discoveries to the eastward is annexed.

On the 31st of August we cut our way out of our icy harbour, the grave of one year's hopes ; and, having the benefit of fair winds, crossed Bathurst's inlet among Wilmot Islands, and safely re-entered the Coppermine river on the 3rd of September. The following day we proceeded to the Bloody Fall, and there secreted our superfluous provisions. The ascent of the Coppermine

(hitherto deemed impracticable), to near the junction of Kendall river, was accomplished on the fifth day. We deposited the boats in a woody bluff, where they can be conveniently repaired next spring: then, taking our bundles on our backs, we traversed the barren grounds, and returned to winter quarters yesterday.

Here we had the satisfaction to find everything in good order, the buildings rendered more comfortable, and some provisions collected. Our return so much earlier than we ourselves expected on leaving Point Turnagain has enabled us to commence the fall fisheries in good time; and, though our stock of ammunition and other necessities for the Indians is reduced very low, want no longer stares us in the face, as it did for several months after our arrival here last year. We are most happy to add that the natives have experienced neither famine nor sickness this season; the only death within our knowledge being that of a blind old man.

Sept. 20.—We have the honour to acknowledge the receipt, this afternoon, of Governor Simpson's despatch of 28th February. As things have fallen out this season, it is fortunate that no party was sent down the Great Fish river to meet us. And, from the experience we now possess of the coast to the eastward, we are of opinion that a retreat by the Coppermine may be effected when the entire ascent of the Great Fish river may be no longer practicable. We feel deeply indebted for the confidence reposed in us, and the ample authority granted by the Governor's circular and previous letters to draw upon the resources of all parts of the country. This power we have hitherto used in extreme moderation; and we are glad to say that we are not reduced to the necessity of exercising it any further. One of our men leaves us in consequence of a bad complaint, and has been replaced by a servant from M'Kenzie's river. To chief trader M'Pherson, the gentleman in charge of that district, we are indebted for valuable assistance in many ways: likewise to chief factor M'Leod, of Athabasca: between them, our order of last winter for an additional supply of pemmican, dogs, sledge-wood, leather, ammunition, guns, axes, and tobacco, has been completed; while the prompt and kind attention of chief trader Ross, at Norway House, has fulfilled the private orders of our people, for a part of which we now send to Great Slave Lake. By the same conveyance we discharge our Chipewyan hunters, as we are unable to provide them any longer in clothing.

Since writing the foregoing we have been obliged to condemn one of our two sea-boats. In its stead we shall transport an inland *bateau*, of a rather superior construction (built by Ritch at Fort Chipewyan two years ago), to the Coppermine next June, by the route followed this year, making up the additional hands required to navigate such a craft with Hare Indian hunters. And, to convey the expedition from this dreary abode at the close of

our enterprise, we shall again require the aid of a boat from M'Kenzie's river. We have the honour, &c.

PETER W. DEASE, C.F.

THOMAS SIMPSON.

*To the Governor, Deputy Governor, and Committee
of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company, London.*

Mr. SIMPSON'S *Narrative of a Journey on foot to the Eastward.*

On the 20th of August, the date appointed for the return of former expeditions from these desolate shores, I left our boats still hopelessly beset with ice, to perform a ten days' journey of discovery on foot to the eastward. My companions were five servants and two Indians. We carried a wooden-framed canvas canoe, and nearly the same other baggage as on the journey to Point Barrow last year, with the addition of a tent for the nightly shelter of the whole party on a coast almost destitute of fuel. Each man's load at starting weighed about half a cwt., and our daily progress averaged 20 geographical miles. About the middle of the first day's journey we passed the farthest point to which Sir John Franklin and his officers walked in 1821. Beyond that, the coast preserved its N.N.E. trending to our encampment of the same night, situated on the pitch of a low cape, which I have named Cape Franklin. From W. to N.E. a new land or crowded chain of islands of great extent, in many places high and covered with snow, stretched along at the distance apparently of 30 miles, and led to the apprehension that we were entering a deep sound or inlet. The mainland now turned off to E.N.E., which continued to be nearly its general bearing for the three following days: it is flat in its outline, our path leading alternately over soft sand, sharp stones, and swampy ground. At the distance of from 1 to 2 miles, the coast is skirted by a range of low stony hills, partially clothed with dull verdure, which send down to the sea numberless brooks and small streams. None of the latter at that season reached above our waists, though the deep and rugged channels of many of them showed that in the spring they must be powerful torrents. Two leagues inland a hill (which I have named Mount George after Governor Simpson) rises to the height of 600 feet, and forms a conspicuous object for a day's journey on either side. The ice all along lay immoveably aground upon the shallow beach, and extended in every direction as far as the eye could reach. The great northern land still stretched out before us, and kept alive doubts of our being engaged in exploring an immense bay, which even the increase in the tides, the quantity of sea-weed and shells, and the discovery of the remains of a large whale and of a polar bear, could not altogether dispel. These doubts seemed almost converted into certainty, as we drew near on the fourth evening an elevated cape,

and saw land apparently all round. With feelings of bitter disappointment I ascended the height, from whose summit a splendid and most unlooked-for view suddenly burst upon me. The ocean, as if transformed by enchantment, rolled its free waves beneath, and beyond the reach of vision to the eastward. Islands of various shape and size overspread its surface; and the northern land terminated in a bold and lofty cape bearing N.E., at least 40 miles distant; while the coast of the continent trended away to the S.E. I stood in fact on a remarkable headland, at the eastern entrance of an ice-obstructed strait. The extensive land to the northward I have called VICTORIA LAND, in honour of our youthful sovereign, and the eastern extremity Cape Pelly, after the Governor of the Honourable Company. To the promontory where we encamped I have attached the name of Cape Alexander, after an only brother, who would give his right hand to be the sharer of my journeys. The rise and fall of the tide there was about 3 feet, being the greatest observed by us in the Arctic seas. The coast here changes its character, the water becomes deep, the approach easy, and I have little doubt that the islands contain secure harbours for shipping. Next morning, at the distance of 8 or 9 miles, we crossed another high cape, formed of trap-rocks, in lat. $68^{\circ} 52' N.$; the variation of the compass being $63^{\circ} E.$ The travelling had become more and more toilsome, our road now passing over some miles of round loose stones; and then through wet mossy tracts sown with large boulders and tangled with dwarf willows. At our usual camping hour we opened a large bay, studded with islands, which ran in for 5 miles to the S.S.W., and then turned off in a bold sweep of rounded granitic hills (like those near Melville Sound and Cape Barrow), dipping to the sight in the E.S.E. at the distance of 30 miles. To walk round even the portion of the bay in view would have consumed three days; the time allotted for outgoing was already expired; and two or three of my men were severely lame, from the fatigue of their burdens, the inequalities of the ground, and the constant immersion in icy-cold water. I besides cherished hopes that, by making the best of our way back, we might, agreeably to my arrangement with Mr. Dease, meet him bringing on one of the boats, in which case, with an open sea before us, we could have still considerably extended our discoveries before the commencement of winter. I may here remark that we were singularly fortunate in the five days of our outward journey, the weather being so moderate and clear that I daily obtained astronomical observations: whereas, before our departure from the boats, and during our return to them, we had continual storms, with frost, snow, rain, and fogs. Close to our farthest encampment appeared the site of three Esquimaux tents of the preceding year, with a little stone chimney apart. We passed the remains of a

larger camp, and several human skeletons, near Cape Franklin ; but nowhere throughout the journey did we find recent traces of that few and scattered people.

The morning of the 25th of August was devoted to the determination of our position, and the erection of a pillar of stones on the most elevated part of the point. After which I took possession of the country, with the usual ceremonial, in the name of the Honourable Company, and for the Queen of Great Britain. In the pillar I deposited a brief sketch of our proceedings, for the information of whoever might find it. Its situation is in lat. $68^{\circ} 44' N.$, long. (reduced by C. F. Smith's watch from excellent lunars at the boats) $106^{\circ} 3' W.$; the magnetic variation being $60^{\circ} E.$ The compass grew sluggish and uncertain in its movements as we advanced eastward, and frequently had to be shaken before it would traverse at all. Two miles to the southward of our encampment a rapid river of some magnitude discharges itself into the bay, the shores of which seemed more broken and indented than those along which we had travelled. Independently of Victoria Land, and an archipelago of islands, I have had the satisfaction of tracing fully 100 miles of coast, and of seeing 30 miles farther, making in all (after deducting Franklin's half-day's journey already mentioned) about 120 miles of continental journey. This is in itself important; yet I value it chiefly for having disclosed an open sea to the eastward, and for suggesting a new route, along the southern shores of Victoria Land, by which that open sea may be attained, while the mainland (as was the case this season) is yet environed by an impenetrable barrier of ice. Whether the open sea to the eastward may lead to Ross's Pillar, or to the estuary of Back's Great Fish river, it is hard to conjecture, though the trending of the most distant land in view should rather seem to favour the latter conclusion.

The same evening, on our return, we met the ice at Trap Cape driving rapidly to the eastward. As we proceeded, the shores continued inaccessible, but open water was now everywhere visible in the offing. Several bands of buck reindeer were migrating to the southward along the hills; two which we shot were in far superior condition to those in Bathurst's Inlet and near the Coppermine. A few musk-oxen were also seen; and numerous flocks of white geese (*Anser hyperboreus*), generally officered by large grey ones (*A. Canadensis*), were assembling in the marshes, and taking their aerial flight to more genial climates. At dusk, on the 29th of August (our tenth day), we regained the boats, and found them still enclosed in the ice, which the N. and westerly gales seemed to have accumulated from far and near towards Point Turnagain.

(Signed)

THOMAS SIMPSON.





